

(U) History Today - 30 March 2010

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(U) HISTORY'S GEOGRAPHY: In Scituate, Rhode Island, near the top of the 7th-highest peak in the state, the old Suddard Farm on Chopmist Hill (elevation 732 feet) served as a Federal Communications Commission (FCC) intercept site. The monitoring station was established in March 1941 and was the largest of 13 sites in the FCC nationwide network. The complex had 11 antennas, 80,000 feet of wire, a power-generating station and a six-foot barbed-wire fence.

(U) The FCC's Radio Intelligence Division (RID) had a COMINT mission in the early days of World War II and regularly intercepted German and Japanese traffic. The 40 radio operators assigned to Chopmist Hill reportedly ran the most effective site in the system, probably due to peculiarities of the terrain and atmospheric conditions. Among the targets monitored here were German weather reports and the transmissions of German spies in North Africa and South America. It is said that coded messages from General Erwin Rommel's Afrika Corps were intercepted here and relayed to the British.

(U) The FCC, used to acting in a more public way than military intelligence units, did not impose the stringent handling requirements on cryptologic materials that the military did. The FCC even made a public information film about its successes in monitoring foreign communications. As a result, the Joint Chiefs of Staff sent a memorandum to President Franklin Roosevelt in mid-1942 which asked that nonmilitary agencies be barred from engaging in foreign communications intelligence. Roosevelt agreed with the need to limit COMINT activities for security reasons, and sent a note to the Director of the Budget on July 8 ordering that funds be discontinued for cryptologic activities by the FCC, OSS, Director of Censorship, and any other federal agencies engaged in such work.

(U) Chopmist Hill had another brush with history at the end of the war. In January 1946, a team inspecting locations under consideration for the headquarters of the United Nations visited two sites in Rhode Island; one was Chopmist Hill. While touring the Suddard house, the inspection team saw radio receivers marked "Madrid," and "Lisbon" and listened as Cairo and the BBC came in clearly. Although Dr. Stoyan Gavilovic of Yugoslavia, the head of the team, was impressed by the site, Chopmist Hill didn't stand a chance against the prospective location on the East River in New York City.

(U) The old Suddard Farm is now a private home. The blockhouse that housed the power generating station still stands, as do many of the poles that held antenna wire.

(U) Thanks to a *History Today* correspondent for drawing our attention to this site.

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